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RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0273

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RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 3786

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SUBJECT: EAP DIRECTOR RAPSON'S MARCH 12 MEETING WITH MOFA

TOKYO 00001185 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Officials from MOFA's Southeast Asia Division told visiting EAP/MLS Director Robert Rapson March 12 that pressuring Burma to release political prisoners, promote dialogue on national reconciliation, improve access for international organizations, and end violence directed at ethnic minorities are goals Japan shares with the United States. However, appointing a UN special envoy to Burma is unlikely to lead to political and human rights reform because it will not mitigate the regime's opposition to dialogue, according to MOFA Senior Foreign Policy Coordinator Maruyama. He saw little prospect for positive change in Burma as long as Senior General Than Shwe remains in power. Japan concurs that, if the regime demonstrates progress towards these goals, it would be appropriate and helpful for the international community to respond in reciprocal fashion. Rapson and Maruyama also briefly discussed relations with Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Visiting EAP/MLS Director Rob Rapson discussed Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam with MOFA Foreign Policy Bureau Senior Foreign Policy Coordinator Ichiro Maruyama, First Southeast Asia Division Principle Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara and First Southeast Asia Division Deputy Director Masaki Kawaguchi on March 12.

Burma

¶3. (C) Rapson outlined four major U.S. policy goals for Burma: the release of political prisoners; the regime engaging in a meaningful dialogue with pro-democracy and opposition elements leading toward national reconciliation; enhanced access for UN agencies, other international organizations, and NGOs for humanitarian projects; and an end to regime-perpetrated violence in ethnic areas. The U.S. is not advocating regime change, he said, but rather the beginning of a genuine dialogue and process of eventual political transition towards democracy. If the regime makes progress through some meaningful, positive step, the international community, including the U.S., would be in a position to consider an appropriate reciprocal response. Japan shares those U.S. goals, Maruyama noted. Japan had congratulated Burma on the ILO agreement, but was also waiting for follow-through. He expressed disappointment that Burma is now denying the International Committee of the Red Cross access, after initially allowing jail visits.

¶4. (C) Rapson pointed out that the January 12 veto of the

Burma Resolution in the UN Security Council wasn't seen as a defeat, but rather as an opportunity. The constructive comments and criticisms of the regime's policies by China and Indonesia (which abstained) in their Explanation of Vote, he noted, provide a basis for interacting with those countries and others on finding a way forward on Burma, which we will pursue. In addition, the U.S. will continue to press for action on Burma in the UN's Human Rights Council and other UN fora. The United States also supports the appointment of a new UN special envoy on Burma with a broader mandate than his/her predecessor. There are currently no plans for a new UNSC resolution, but we intend to keep Burma on the UNSC agenda.

¶ 15. (C) Maruyama (who served three tours in Burma) was not persuaded that appointment of a special envoy would be especially effective. The special envoy cannot resolve the issues if the regime and Aung San Suu Kyi hate one another and are unwilling to talk. At present, there is no incentive for the regime to talk to her. While China wants Ibrahim Gambari to continue in the envoy role, Maruyama believes a special envoy from Asia, someone like former President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines, might be more effective. In the end, he said, Burma will only accept an Asian envoy that will say good things about Burma. Visits by UN special envoys produce little in the way of concrete results or new avenues for solving the problem, he added.

¶ 16. (C) Maruyama agreed with Rapson that Burma should be discussed at every possible forum, but lamented the lack of a viable solution. He speculated that perhaps it would be necessary to wait until after Senior General Than Shwe is no longer in power. He is "very pessimistic" that things will change for the better as long as Than Shwe was in charge. He described Burma's Foreign Minister as "stubborn," and "just a spokesman" and said he does not trust foreigners. Burma

TOKYO 00001185 002.2 OF 003

prefers to deal with Russia, China, and India, rather than the United States, Japan, or the ASEAN countries. Rapson noted that U.S. sanctions policy will remain in place as would our strong advocacy for human rights issues through UN fora and elsewhere. At the same time, the U.S. will seek to engage with key regional players in exploring ways forward consistent with our policy objectives. Maruyama said he hoped there would be an opportunity for FM Aso to meet with his Burmese counterpart.

¶ 17. (C) China is the key, Maruyama agreed, followed by India and the ASEAN countries, and then Japan and Korea. China has the best access, Rapson noted, and seems principally concerned about stability and policy predictability in Burma rather than human rights and democracy. Rapson mentioned that EAP DAS Eric John was in Beijing on March 12 to follow up with the Chinese and gauge China's intent and interest to press Burma on reform. State Councilor Tang's recent trip to Burma was a positive sign, Maruyama remarked. Rapson assured Maruyama that the United States is committed to continuing to coordinate with Japan on Burma policy, even as it engages more with China on these kinds of issues.

¶ 18. (C) In response to Rapson's view that the traditional ASEAN consensus on Burma has weakened, which has provided an opening for the organization and its members to press for reform, Maruyama responded that Malaysia and Singapore are "fed up" with Burma, particularly since Kin Nyunt was removed from office. The Philippines has limited relations with Burma, so its pronouncements are rather hollow, he added. Maruyama agreed, however, that Indonesia is the key in ASEAN, by virtue of its good relations with Burma and its position on the UN Security Council. Rapson concurred on the importance of a leading role by ASEAN on Burma, Maruyama lamented that India's efforts to influence change in Burma thus far have been disappointing.

Thailand

¶9. (C) In the wake of the September 19 coup, Japan continues to express its concerns about democracy in Thailand and about the direction of current economic policies, Kuwabara noted. He was also concerned that General Surayud is not living up to expectations that he would improve on Prime Minister Thaksin's record in dealing with insurgents in the south. (Kuwabara was unaware of any specific humanitarian programs aimed at improving circumstances in southern Thailand, noting that there were few Japanese ODA projects of any kind in Thailand, given the country's relative wealth.) That said, Thailand remains the most important destination for Japanese investment in ASEAN, Kuwabara said, and Japan is ready to sign an economic partnership agreement (EPA) once a few minor issues are resolved and the Thai are ready. General Surayud is considering traveling to Japan in April at the invitation of a university, he noted, but he is unaware of any plans to schedule official meetings at this time. Rapson reviewed for the MOFA participants, United States policy views and objectives in the wake of the coup.

Cambodia

¶10. (C) Rapson described Cambodia as moving in a generally positive direction, despite endemic problems of governance, rule of law and corruption. He pointed out that the U.S. is not directly supporting the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, but is concerned about the current differences between the international judges and Cambodian judges which, if not satisfactorily resolved, could derail the KRT. Kuwabara noted that Japan and Cambodia are currently in the second round of negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty, and predicted there would probably be one further round of discussions.

Vietnam

¶11. (C) Discussing briefly the U.S. visit of Foreign Minister Khiem, Kuwabara noted that Prime Minister Dzung had been Prime Minister Abe's first official visitor, and that the two had issued a joint statement calling for efforts toward a strategic partnership. Abe reciprocated the visit, Kuwabara noted, taking 130 businesspeople to Hanoi for APEC in November 2006. Vietnam is getting quite a bit of attention from Japanese businesspeople, he added.

TOKYO 00001185 003.2 OF 003

¶12. (U) EAP/MLS Director Robert Rapson cleared this cable.
SCHIEFFER